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ABSTRACT

Cerritos College needs to develop a more effective transfer process in order to assist more students in achieving their educational goals. Only 15% of students actually transfer, while 60% initially had intentions to do so. The main reasons for the low rate of transfer are: (1) the lack of unity among the various transfer services; (2) the under staffing of certain counseling departments; (3) the breakdown of communication between the president, faculty, and students; and (4) the lack of utilization of important statistics, such as data collected during the initial assessment battery. Transfer services should be consolidated, more counselors should be hired, and group counseling sessions aimed at specific majors should be considered. Another possible suggestion is the implementation of a counseling intern program. Faculty should also openly discuss transfer with students on a regular basis and utilize helpful statistics in order to promote the transfer process. Through these changes, Cerritos College can add to the quality of their current transfer program and assist more students with their educational goals and progress. (YKH)

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Evaluation of the Transfer Process:

A Student Perspective

Prepared for

Scholars Honors Program

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AN EVALUATION OF THE TRANSFER PROCESS: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Cerritos College is a diverse institution filled with an equally diverse student body. As students at Cerritos we are afforded many opportunities and services which allow us to improve our lives as well as our futures. Of paramount importance to the future of many Cerritos students is the institution to which they will matriculate. In respect to transferring, we are provided with various sources of useful information. Yet, through our efforts and with the encouragement of our mentor, Trudy Peralta, we have come to the conclusion that there is a serious problem regarding the method used at Cerritos to process transfer students.

Through a comprehensive survey we have conducted of over one hundred students, ranging from Biological Science majors to English majors, we have concluded that the most overwhelming obstacle in the path of students wanting to transfer is the Cerritos transfer process itself. It was made painfully obvious that there is a problem with the current system at Cerritos when we found out that of the 60% of students who indicate, upon enrollment, their intent to transfer, only 15% are achieving their goal. We believe the main contributing factors to the low rate of transferring are:

1) The lack of unity among the various transfer services.

2) The understaffing of certain counseling departments.

3) The breakdown of communication between the president, faculty and the students.

4) The lack of utilization of important statistics.

The Various Transfer Services Lack Unity

First, we will address the current Cerritos transfer process, and then suggest some ways to improve upon its efficiency. As we previously stated, Cerritos College offers transfer students a myriad of valuable informative services. Our concern lies in the fact that many of these services operate as individual entities as opposed to one seamless process. An example of this dilemma is seen over and over again when students request career information from an academic counselor. Currently, the student must make a counseling appointment which, on an average, can take as long as two weeks. Then, as often happens, if the counselor does not have the relevant information, the student is referred to the Assessment Center, which is located across campus, making it difficult to go from center to center in order to exchange and compare the advice one is given.

This journey to the assessment center is fine for able bodied students, but one vital factor that should be taken into consideration is that Cerritos College has a fairly large number of disabled students who, along with every other student,

would benefit from the consolidation of transfer resources. Many students may be discouraged to continue inquiring about programs if they find it difficult to acquire the information needed for their success. If the counseling, assessment and transfer centers were united geographically, the information provided to students would be more accessible and would enable them to get a more effective response to their individualized concerns.

Combining these centers would also eliminate students taking unnecessary courses, which, in the case of Todd Norcross, a Bio-Chem major, led to the postponement of his graduation from Cerritos. The sad fact is that Todd is just one of many students who has shared his dissatisfaction with the current system of operations at Cerritos. In essence, what we are proposing is a unified effort on the part of all the centers involved in the transfer process. It may be argued that the departments, as they stand, are effective in the information they provide, and that it is the students' responsibility to manage their time in order to acquire the information needed. It may further be argued that relocating the assessment center is not feasible. In answer to the first argument, yes, it is an undeniable fact that once students reach the college level, it is their responsibility to be aggressive in acquiring the information needed for their success. However, this does not change the fact that the purpose of providing transfer services is to aide students in reaching their educational goal. In response to the second argument, relocating the assessment center, we have learned that the college is planning a massive

reorganization of the entire campus grounds. Currently the relocation of the assessment center is not an issue, yet we feel this small change to the master plan would benefit the students.

The Counseling Department Is Understaffed

Another contributing factor to the low rate of transfer may be that our counseling department is understaffed. This is most evident when one takes the example of the transfer center into consideration. The fact that there is only one full time counselor overseeing the entire transfer center operation seems to suggest that a ratio of 1: 20,369 is adequate. This ratio concerns us as students because we find it difficult to believe that one person could successfully handle the needs of such a large and diverse student body. Many of the university representatives that participate in transfer days are repeatedly from a select group of schools. We seem to be lacking the variety in representation of four year institutions, such as San Diego State, Pepperdine, Stanford and various other schools. Granted, some schools may choose not to come, but the transfer center should aggressively pursue as many universities as possible. This is difficult because our counseling department is understaffed, and, with only one counselor in charge, it may be too difficult to coordinate a program representing a more diverse group of schools. Adding more counselors would help in this area.

It is evident that the transfer center requires another counselor to coordinate programs which will supplement what is currently being done by the transfer center. This employee could relieve some of the burden that has been placed on the shoulders of Ms. Shepherd by extending the outreach services to new schools which are not currently being represented at Cerritos College. This co-counselor could help Ms. Shepherd run the transfer center more efficiently and increase the accessibility of the transfer center. Even though another counselor may be expensive, the costs could be incurred through the development of a computerized data base that would allow the school to produce a schedule of classes three to four months prior to the current release date. This would allow some students to enroll much earlier in the semester, giving the school a large amount of money to collect interest on. The revenue collected from the interest should help offset the cost of hiring a new counselor. The following is a table consisting of conservative figures outlining the above mentioned project.

$	25,000.00		1	$	25,000.00
	10,000	$	191.00	$	1,910,000.00
$	1,910,000.00		2%	$	114,600.00

The figures on this table are based on the projections of 10,000 students enrolling for one semester at 12 units and paying the normal health, ID and parking fees. The school would incur the one time expenditure of $ 25,000. The projected financial benefits of this expenditure would be as follows:

1) 10,000 students enroll for the Spring or Fall semester 3 months sooner than is currently the case.
2) Each student spends $191.00 on tuition, health, ID, and parking fees.
3) The total of $1,910,000 is invested at 2% for three months, with a projected revenue of $114,600 dollars.

With newly created revenue, the school would be able to consider the possible hiring of another counselor.

Also in the academic counseling department, there are only 13 full-time and 12 part-time counselors. In respect to the part-time counselors, they are only required to work three to nineteen hours a week, which hardly seems adequate to meet the demands of 20,369 students. One counselor informed us that the average student should ideally receive at least thirty minutes per appointment. Although there are some counselors who give students the time they need, it has been our collective experience that, on the average, many counselors answer only the questions a student asks. Because of their overcrowded schedules, some counselors do not encourage a conversation with students, making the counseling session last anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes. We also learned from the counseling department that for the month of February 1997, the counseling department saw a total of 1,894 students. In all fairness, we will share that we learned that as of May 15, 1997, there were 8,198 vocational students registered in a total of 133

vocational majors, so this number can automatically be subtracted from the original 20,369 students. However, we are sure these students require counseling as well. We further understand that not all students need to see an academic counselor, but when comparing the 1,894 students that did seek academic guidance to the number of students that desired to transfer, this number is extremely low.

One possible solution to this issue is the creation of group counseling sessions aimed at specific majors. This would create a vehicle for a large amount of information to be distributed at one time, thus addressing the needs of many. Furthermore, utilizing the postcard system, counselors can track transferring students as well as encourage other students to possibly consider transferring. It is understood that not all students see a counselor throughout a semester, yet considering all the students who do seek appointments, the current number of counselors is not sufficient. The fact that students have to wait nearly two weeks for an appointment is proof that we need more counselors.

Another possible solution suggested to us by Dr. Bell (Dean of Admissions), was the implementation of a counseling intern program. His solution is to start a program with four year universities in the area that would be willing to give their graduating students credit for working as interns in a counseling capacity. The interns would get the needed hours to meet their credential requirements, and our counselors would be provided with the help that is much needed. The intern counselors would be assigned to one of our current counselors, so that our faculty

could serve as mentors to insure quality service. In the process, Cerritos would be receiving counseling services for our students, while training new counselors..

These problems have led to the implementation of the President's Emphasis on Transfer program (PET). Dr. Gaskin developed the PET Program to increase the number of students transferring, as well as to improve the quality of transfer services. One positive aspects of this program is the fact that faculty from all divisions are brought together to work toward one common goal: to encourage more students to transfer. This is especially evident when we look at the Scholars' Honors Program (SHP). The SHP is not only an overwhelming success brought about by the PET Program, but it is also an example of the progress that can be made through a unified effort of administration, faculty, and students. Another of the success stories of the PET Program has been the hiring of Carol Beato, who has recently been made a full time staff member. Mrs. Beato was hired to implement programs to specifically increase the transfer rate at Cerritos College. Part of her efforts are geared towards a mentoring program designed to help current students come in contact with Cerritos College graduates who have gone on to four year institutions. Her hiring proves that the college is trying to remedy some of the transfer problems.

One flaw of the PET program is that while it could be an asset to the entire student body, we have found that the majority of the students that were formally addressed were students that seem to make up a large portion of the 15% already

geared to transfer. The success of this program could be improved through better circulation of information to the general student body. The distribution of information from Dr. Gaskin, which is part of the PET program, does not always reach the students, thus causing a problem.

The Breakdown of Communication Must be Minimized to Ensure Transfer Success

The breakdown of communication between the president, faculty and the students hinders the success of the transfer process. In the President's effort to increase the transfer rate, he has issued messages to all faculty members. These messages consist of vital information in regards to current transfer services. Yet it has come to our attention that many faculty do not distribute the messages to their students. This is one example where students cannot be held accountable for not acquiring transfer information. If the faculty does not disseminate this information, students are left in the dark when it comes to receiving information that Dr. Gaskin deems vital to transfer. For example, we (the authors of this paper) are taking 39 units among us, and ~~as~~ we have yet to be informed of the President's Message from our professors. We understand that many faculty members are very busy and that time is a factor when deciding whether to read the President's Message or not. However, the payoff of giving a few minutes of class time to discuss transfer may be that more students will consider transferring. Many

students find it highly motivational to be addressed by faculty in regards to transfer; it gives students the confidence to believe that they can further their educational goals.

Valuable Information is Not Being Utilized to Facilitate the Transfer Process

Another concern which needs to be addressed is the way in which statistical information is not being utilized to promote the transfer process. The statistics we are referring to are based on information taken from applications filled out while taking the assessment battery tests. This data indicates the number of students who intend to transfer to four year institutions and is vital in tracking transfer students. Yet, we have been told that this information is not being utilized. One possible application of this data is its utilization by academic counselors to access these numbers and possibly contact students intending to transfer. If more transferring students felt that our academic counselors had an interest in their scholastic success, as well as in their successful transfer to a four year university, they might be more inclined to seek help. For many students the assessment battery tests are the first interaction between the student and the institution. This first contact is of great consequence to both college and student because it determines the stage for the students' perception of the college. If students are not receiving the information that they requested initially, they may lose faith in the transfer process altogether.

CONCLUSION

As you can see from our findings, our current transfer process is in need of change. It was not our intent to cast a negative light on any current programs, but rather we hope that our suggestions will benefit Cerritos College as a whole.

This is by no means a complete condemnation of Cerritos College; on the contrary, we hope you see our presentation as a way to add to the quality of our Colleges' current transfer system. We have seen some progress already taking place, and we hope that this progress continues.

Acknowledgments

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